

# Akkad & Assyria

## Famed Ancient Empires





In this article we cover two ancient cultures in Mesopotamia because they followed on each other and one can say that Assyria inherited the territories and culture including the script of Akkad. The people which later became Akkad had a long history in various kingdoms and city states in Mesopotamia before the rise of their own Akkad empire under Sargon I. Akkad emerged as a distinct culture next to the famed Sumer civilization. It is possible that the Akkad people already took part in the south Mesopotamian so-called Urban Revolution around 4000 BC. But the Akkad empire only existed for about 150 years starting from 2334 BC. Its territory stretched from the Gulf up the Euphrates and Tigris. The Gulf coast line was lying much more inland as the delta over time silted up and moved up to 100 km southwards until today.

#### ***Akkad Details***

The following cities belonged to the Akkad territory: Babylon, Sippa, Eshnunna, Samarra, Nineveh, Assur, Mari, Terqa and Eridu. Akkad went through a vital transition from fighting Sumer city states to become a true empire which was followed by Assyria and Babylon.

We found that Akkad named scribes were already recorded in Nippur archives around 2600 BC. And the 1st Kish dynasty had rulers with Akkad names. Interestingly, Mari was the first city state to use the Akkad language. This was done because Mari was under Akkad control and strong trade ties existed whereby a common language helped for communication. With its growing influence Akkad became quickly the lingua franca in Mesopotamia.

#### ***First Ruler Sargon***

We have selected some of the important kings to give you an interesting insight into their reign and the empire they ruled. Sargon is the first in our list and was a high ranking official at Kish under king Ur-Zababa. At the time Sargon was a fashion name and his royal name was Scharru-ken meaning true legitimate king. When he came to power in 2335 BC he first used the title king of Sumer and Akkad which was used for the next 200 years by his successors as well. During the 56 years of his reign Sargon also used the title Shar-kischati meaning king of entirety or king of the four quarters of the earth. In the Sumer creation story the world comprised of four parts which more or



less represented the north, west, south and east with the capital in the middle. He built a new capital called Akkad further north which also became the name of the state and language. The ancient capital has not been discovered yet and is believed lying underneath Baghdad.

### *The Kish Prophecy*

This is an interesting story but it is not certain if it is partly or fully true. The king of Kish was told that Sargon one of his important servants would replace him. So, he planned to kill Sargon which failed. Therefore, he sent him to Uruk to have him killed there which again was unsuccessful. Sargon seemed to have had a strong position already to be able to survive these attempts and retaliate. In revenge he planned to conquer all city states step by step. First on the list was naturally Kish. Thereafter, he conquered Umma, Uruk and Ur. In this way Akkad was created and became the first true regional empire with one language Akkadian.

### *Royal Nepotism Secured Power*

No wonder he faced constant rebellions of city states. In addition, insurgent Gutian tribes from the Zargos mountains in the east created problems. He used various strategies to control subdued kingdoms from Elam to Turkey and to the Mediterranean coast. This included marriage diplomacy and appointing his sons as governors in all the conquered capitals and his daughters were assigned high priestesses of moon god Sin to control the local priesthoods. Most territories were not annexed but made tributaries to pay taxes to Akkad. In total Sargon led 34 battles and subdued over 50 foreign rulers. His army is reported to have had more than 5,000 well trained soldiers. And he was the first to undertake military naval expeditions across the Gulf waters to Dilmun and Magan. Around 2200 BC he also conquered and destroyed the important city states of Mari and Ebla.

### *First Poet in History*

His daughter Enheduanna as high priestess of moon god Nanna in Ur had an important position as Nanna's daughter Inanna was goddess of love and war. Enheduanna was the first known poetry writer in history and created three famed hymns. It started with

the hymn to Inanna or exaltation of Inanna followed by in-nin sa-gur-ra and the temple hymns. The following summary of these hymns give you a glimpse of the relationship between kings, gods and the role of high priestesses. Enheduanna depicts Inanna as disciplining mankind as goddess of battle another of her divine tasks. She thereby unites the warlike Ishtar qualities to those of the gentler Sumerian goddess of love. She describes Inanna like a great storm bird who swoops down on the lesser gods and sends them fluttering off like surprised bats. Then, in probably the most interesting part of the hymn Enheduanna herself steps forward in the first person to recite her own past glories to establish her credibility and explaining her present plight. She has been banished as high priestess from the temple in the city of Ur and from Uruk and exiled to the steppe. She begs the moon god Nanna to intercede for her because the city of Uruk under the ruler Lugalanne has rebelled against Sargon. The rebel Lugalanne has even destroyed the temple Eanna being one of the greatest temples in the ancient world and then made advances on his sister-in-law. Here we see also the political intention.

### *Akkad Economy*

The economy was based on an effectively or-





ganized agriculture with taxes paid in kind or in labor for public buildings, forts, temples, palaces and irrigation canals. The important grain storage buildings were owned, operated and harvest surpluses distributed by the king. At that time already wheat fields were protected by forts and soldiers. The well managed irrigation systems resulted in reduced floods, lesser droughts and limited famine. In difficult times farmers worked under temple management to increase efficiency. In this way the agricultural yield could be increased from one grain seeded to 30 grains harvested. For the first time grain was transported between south and north to balance regional weak harvests. In the more arid south irrigation was necessary but the north was able to work without because of sufficient rain falls. Sargon allowed private enterprises next to palace and temple driven economies. Long distance trade took place with Dilmun in Bahrain, Magan in Oman and Melucha in the Indus valley. Silver was sourced from Anatolia, lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, cedar wood from Lebanon and copper from Oman. Amorite herdsmen had to pay for grazing their animals on Akkad land with meat, milk, cheese and wool. The first land survey was documenting land ownership.

#### *Akkad Language & Science*

Akkad scribes adopted the Sumer cuneiform script to the Semitic based Akkad language with specific expressions and rather different sounds. The result was considered aesthetically pleasing so that it was used for a long time until the Old Babylonian period even after the short Akkad period ended. The Babylon astronomy knowledge was based on the first Ak-

kadian texts. Sargon's son Rimush conquered Elam and Marhashi. When his grandson Naramsin was in power the Akkadian empire was in its heydays and controlled the upper Tigris and Chabur valley areas plus Susa and all southern Mesopotamian cities. He has built the central Enlil temple at Nippur and Inanna temple at Zabalam. Another grandson had to fight rebellions in Sumer cities and the empire started to fall apart. A period of civil war followed. Consequently, king Gutaea from the Zargos mountains conquered and ruled Akkad for 40 years. And Sumer city states rose to independence again under his rule.

#### *Akkad Demise*

The reasons for the demise of Akkad are not certain. Today it is believed to have been more climate change driven than previously thought as northern Mesopotamia became more arid at the time. For example, Tell Leilan was given up early as river levels drastically dropped around 2300 BC. Therefore, the agrarian subsidies and taxes reduced taking the Akkad state structure its income. Another theory is mentioned blaming the destruction of the Enlil temple in Nippur, which created a curse and led to its demise.

#### *Curse of Akkad*

This is an interesting story. Later records describe the fall of Akkad like this. Because Naram-Sin attacked Nippur and destroyed the Ekur temple standing under the protection of main god Enlil whereby he unleached negative oracles. These resulted in the withdrawal from eight deities of the key Anunnaki pantheon of their divine support for Akkad. The oracle was translated as follows:



For the first time since cities were built and founded,  
 The great agricultural tracts produced no grain,  
 The inundated tracts produced no fish,  
 The irrigated orchards produced neither syrup nor wine,  
 The gathered clouds did not rain, the masgurum did not grow.  
 At that time, one shekel's worth of oil was only one-half quart,  
 One shekel's worth of grain was only one-half quart ...  
 These sold at such prices in the markets of all the cities!  
 He who slept on the roof, died on the roof,  
 He who slept in the house, had no burial,  
 People were flailing at themselves from hunger.

### **The Rise of Assyria**

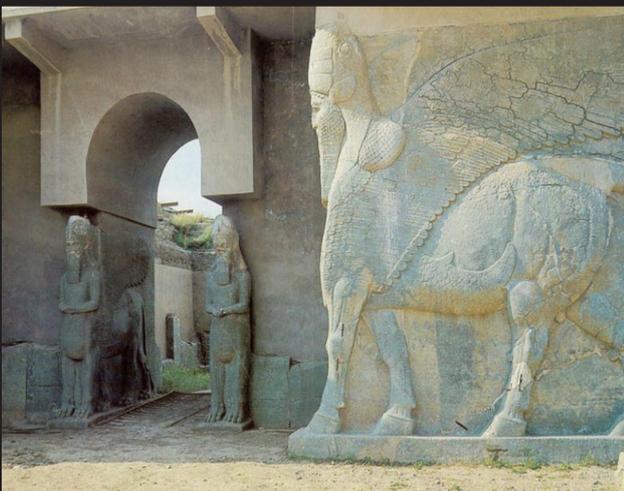
Now let's look at a new arising super power in Mesopotamia Assyria. It began in Assur where a vital fertility cult was practiced in the Ishtar temple. The inhabitants were mainly traders and Assur functioned in the beginning as a free trade economy. One can also describe it as an oligarchy with a king acting more as a primus inter pares or chairman of the alum or city council. With the reign of



king Shamshi-Adad it changed to a more autocratic rule.

### **Assyrian History**

Assyria can be divided into three main periods lasting over 1,700 years with a king list naming over 120 rulers. The first period is called the Old Empire which lasted for nearly 1,000 years until 1380 BC followed by the Middle Empire until 912 BC and finally the Neo-Assyria period ending by 610 BC. Over these periods Assyrian kings have chosen different capitals starting with Assur during the Old Empire followed by Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta and Assur again during the Middle Empire. The next four capitals were selected during the Neo-Assyrian period such as Nimrud, newly erected Dur-Sharrukin followed by Nineveh and towards the end the last king fled north to Harran. But the last 300 years of the Neo-Assyrian period was the greatest phase of Assyria with the largest extension of its empire. For example Tiglath-Pileser II more than doubled the size of Assyrian controlled territories including Babylon and the Levant area. But 2,600 years ago the strong Assyria was rather quickly and violently conquered by an alliance of Babylon and Medes. Its territory was



carved up with the majority going to Babylon and the rest to Medes and Egypt.

### King Shamshi-adad

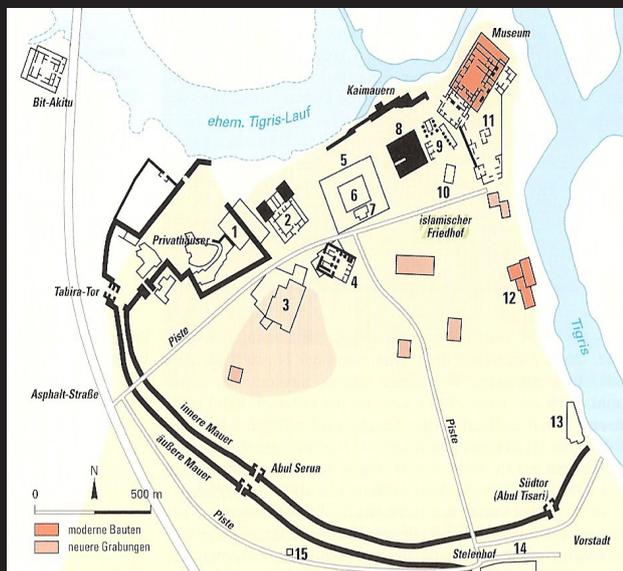
These short summaries should give you a brisk insight about the activities some selected Assyrian kings. He ruled from 1813 BC for 32 years. After he succeeded his father as king of Ekallatum a city which remains were not found yet he was forced to flee to Babylon when Naram-Sin of Eshnunna invaded the area. Thereafter he returned and captured Ashur to establish Assyria as strong regional power. He claimed descent from Akkadian rulers to support his new Assur rule. His focus was on control of northern trade routes but he gave up Anatolian trade colonies which played an important role for long distance trade. He used the title of great king and king of universere who built the temple of Manishtushu. He also erected a new palace in Shubat-Enlil between Nineveh and Urkish. 1800 BC he defeated Mari and appointed his sons governors of Ekallatum and Mari. His marriage diplomacy helped to keep peace and forming an alliance with Qatna ruler Ischchi-Addu against Halab or Aleppo part of Jamchad. After his death his sons could not hold the empire together.

### New Capital Assur

The ancient capital Assur today called Qalat Sharqat is situated about 110 km south of Mosul on the Tigris. Around 2000 BC the city was a province of Ur's 3rd dynasty, thereafter it became an independent free trading city. In the beginnings Assyria was strongly influenced by the Hurritic culture and may have been under stronger Mitanni control as



previously assumed. First Assyrian kings may have been Mitanni vassals or appointed governors and not yet kings. The king list for that period might have been a propagandistic listing because it was created later. Supporting this argument are the missing royal inscriptions on buildings for the first Assyrian kings. These inscriptions only started appearing after 1420 BC with Enlil-nasir II. In 2003 Assur finally became UNESCO world heritage site. A plan to build a



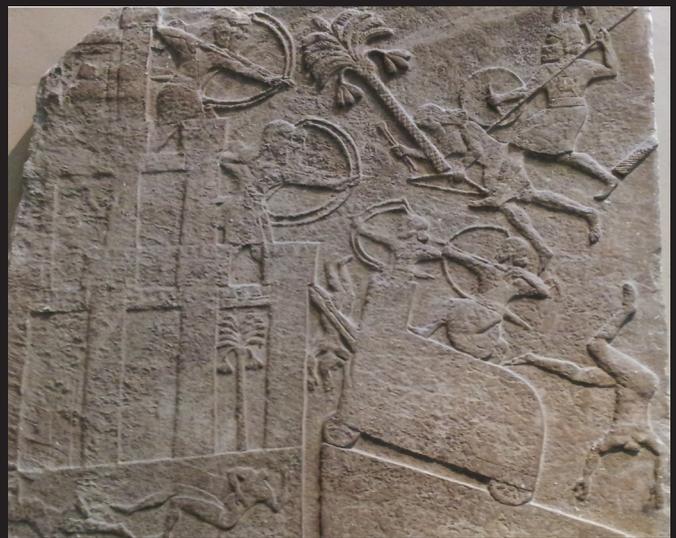
dam about 20 years ago would have flooded the site. Fortunately, it was brought to a stand still until today through the US invasion at the time.

### ***Strong Assyrian Army***

Assyria became known for its highly efficient and military advanced army with special forces such as a rapid response section, cavalry including horse drawn chariots with three warriors, naval forces and besieging unit with heavy attack equipment. Not to forget the important infantry consisting of light, medium and heavy equipped units as well as pioneers to build and maintain heavy equipment and the necessary supply units. Imagine all this already existed over 3,000 years ago. And soldiers got rewarded with part of the booty which was a strong motivation. During the Middle Empire there was no standing army which was cheaper. In need the trained soldiers were mobilized and left their normal jobs. In Neo-Assyrian times a professional trained and well equipped army was formed and stationed in various parts of the empire consisting of local and foreign sourced troops. In the peak several hundred thousand soldiers were under arms. They used a long list of besieging techniques such as total blockade, tunnels, diverting rivers, mobile towers, heavy ramming equipment, building ramps and using ladders. They even produced collapsible furniture and tents to move on quickly. Were the Assyrians the inventors of the first folding chairs and tables?

### ***King's Roads***

The first road network called the king's roads was erected including a quick and efficient messenger service. For example, messengers took only five days to cover 700 km including crossing rivers where bridges did not yet exist. They used changing riders and mules on a relay network to cover such distances. This was the first reported use of riding messengers in history. This was an important reason for the successful administration of such a huge empire and to be able to react quickly in cases of uprisings and revolts. To create one uniform state including Mesopotamia, Syria and Levant certain parts of the Assyrian population was relocated. It was the strongest known army securing the largest empire at the time. Assyria also used drastic penalties for rebellion of vassal kingdoms and depor-



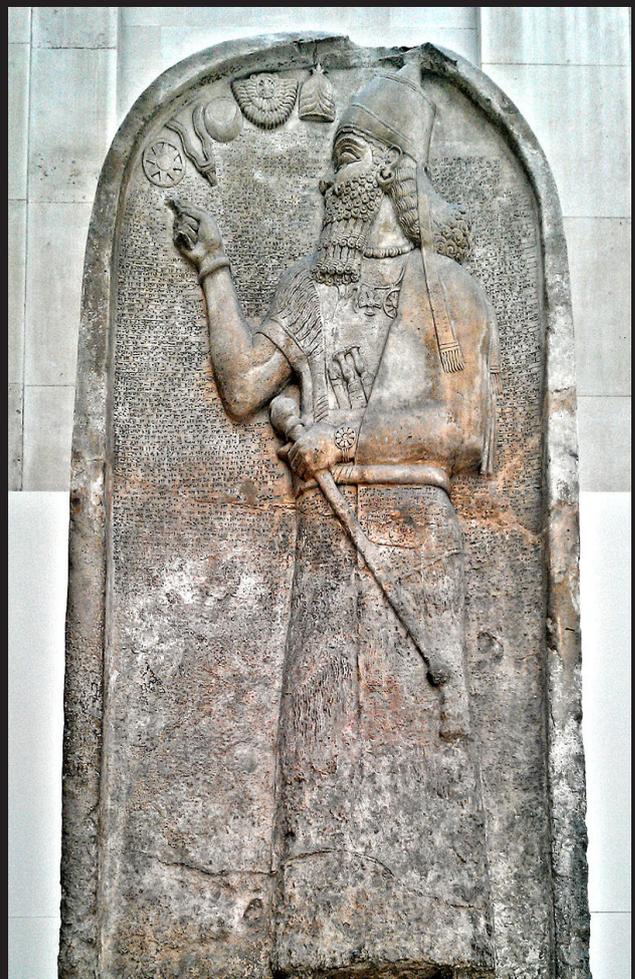
tation of approximately three million people and torture is reported. The deportations were well planned relocations and this was aimed at increasing agricultural production. Records show that 14,000 people from Mitanni and 20,000 from Hatti were deported. In this way Assyria created the needed huge slave force for the numerous and immense construction projects. For a building project normally 2,000 men were required. All these activities were explained with the wish of god Ashur. But there also existed a well organized recruiting system summarizing all data about the available manpower, necessary food rations, responsibilities and tasks. The needed informations were gathered by a regular census to plan the agricultural production for needed food supplies.

### *King Tukulti-ninurta*

This king came into power 1244 BC and ruled for 36 years. He expanded the empire to include parts of Anatolia and Babylon. How brutal such attacks sometimes were showed reports that Babylons city walls were destroyed, part of the population killed and the rest deported. He took Babylon's king in chains to Assur and also seized as booty the statue of city god Marduk to Assur where she stayed for 100 years. This act should demoralize the people of Babylon and to surpress any revolts he installed Assyrian administration in Babylon. This king also built a new palace in Kar Tukulti-ninurta 3 km north of Assur on the other Tigris river-side. The Tukulti-ninurta epic is an interesting historic piece of literature in cuneiform script. But finally in a palace revolt he was killed by his son Ashur-nasir-pal.

### *Assyrian Laws*

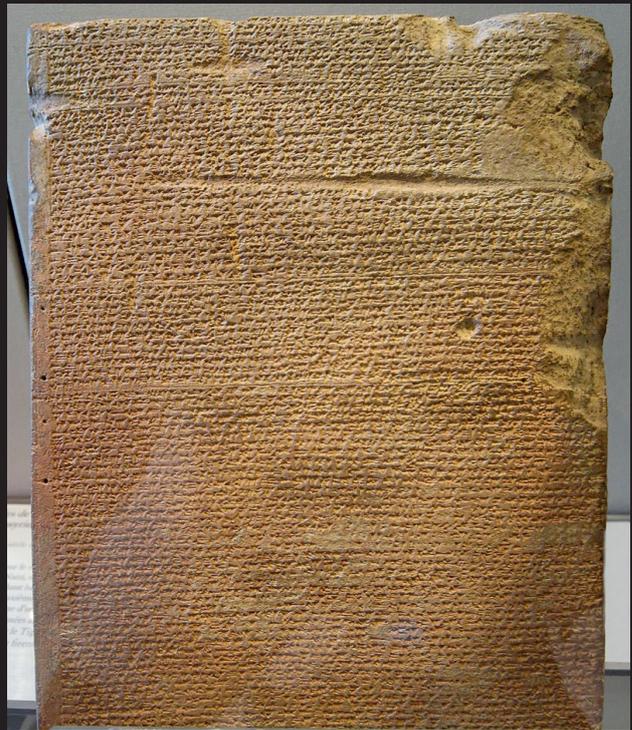
A written collection of laws created by Tukulti-ninurta was discovered at Assur. This consisted of a series of 15 clay tablets, but most were copies of laws created 300 years earlier. Nine kings from Ashur-uballit I to Tiglath-Pileser I are referred to in 20 decrees. They were possibly created for the new Assur library built by Tukulti-ninurta. The texts include decrees concerning two groups of persons free people and slaves. This is different to earlier laws which included three or four social classes. These laws are mainly concerned with palace inner circle women and their interaction vice versa male palace officials therefore called Harem Decrees.



One cuneiform text differentiates women into three groups, wives, widows and the priestess class. The decrees include regulations about all women matters, veiling, witch craft, blasphemy, false accusations, assault, homicide, sexual offences, abortion, but as well inheritance, agriculture, irrigation, pledges, deposits, theft and maritime traffic. Veiling is an interesting point. Women had to wear a veil in public but slave women, prostitutes and unmarried priestesses were excluded.

#### *Position of Women*

The texts indicate as well that there was no difference between men and women during the Old Empire. This changed as during the Middle Empire women rights decreased. Women had only the same rights regarding owning and selling houses and both could divorce and remarry again. Interesting are the arrangements about female slaves. When a couple did not have any children after marriage the husband could have them with a female slave and these children were treated legally as his own. But the slave mother did not become his second wife. He was only allowed to have a second wife when he spent a longer period outside Assyria in a trading colony for example. This second wife was not able to join him in Assur only the children he could take along against a compensation to his second wife. In Assyria debtors who could not repay their debt could become slaves or sell their children into slavery to repay their debt. A male slave did cost 30 shekels and a female 20. Female slaves normally did household work and also cared for their master's children.



#### *King Tiglath-Pileser I*

He came to power in 1115 BC and reigned for 38 years. He reformed the military forces and expanded the empire further. And he was the first Assyrian king to record true annals. He loved hunting and has reportedly killed many wild bulls, lions and even wild elephants. His building activities included new temples with parks and gardens. The latter played an important role in royal life and were sophisticated structures with irrigation and exotic trees from far away lands. As military leader he defeated the Mushki kingdom with its capital Alalakh who threatened Nineveh. In addition, we ventured deep into Anatolia and took 60 towns in Nairi region near lake Van in Urartu. During a military campaign in the Levant he conquered Byblos and Sidon. Further he attacked Babylon and plundered it. He also created the Middle Assyrian laws and the Palace Edicts also called the Harem Decrees.

#### *Assyrian Beliefs*

The king was selected by main deity Ashur and his representative on earth. That gave him enormous powers and support. At his enthronement he was entrusted by Ashur to expand the land under his feet. So there existed an obligation to undertake one military campaign each year. In the Assyrian beliefs the lands outside their borders were a thread as they were uncivilized, did not followed the rituals and therefore in chaos and had to be

conquered to appease god Ashur. This was the basis for the first political propaganda in history which was supported by some times fabricated reports in the royal annals.

### *King Ashur-nasir-apli*

He ruled for 25 years from 884 BC. He undertook various military campaigns to the Mediterranean and regained and consolidated previously lost territories. During his reign he changed the capital from Assur to ancient Kalah 70 km north of Assur. Kalah was expanded to twice the size of Assur and totally rebuilt. The city wall was 8 km long to protect 360 ha of the city. A new citadel with huge palace 26,000 m<sup>2</sup> was erected plus temples for gods Ninurta, Nabu and Ishtar. The new palace was called northwest palace with 3 courtyards for the king, his harem ladies and the needed administration officials. The throne room was covered with alabaster walls fully decorated with relief scenes of the king's military successes and divine connection in a very similar style to Egyptian scenes. The new capital inauguration was celebrated with 5,000 foreign guests in total 70,000 participants being well served with food and drink.

### *Neo-Assyrian State*

During this period the state was divided into 70 provinces each headed by a governor appointed by the king. The governor position was not hereditary and all governor therefore were eunuchs to ensure that they did not have any children. It was a decentralized administration. But the king could intervene at any point in time. Ashur-nasir-apli II moved the royal administration from Assur to Kalah, Sargon II moved the administration from Kalah to Dur Sharrukin and Sancherib moved it again from Dur Sharrukin to Nineveh. Nevertheless, Assur always remained the most important religious and ideological center of Assyria with the main Assur temple. In Assyria same as in Egypt the king was chosen by god and was his only divine representative on earth. Kings maintained many fully staffed palaces in all major cities across the empire for their regular traveling. And the population had to take a loyalty oath to the king. The imperative oath ceremony was performed with drinking water to ensure no breaches from within. In Assyria only members within the royal bloodline could take the throne. So, successors were either sons, brothers or nephews. Sons out of a liaison with harem ladies had also the possibil-



ity to become rulers. This made certain that a possible infertility of a king's wife did not end the royal bloodline. Therefore, Assyria was the only royal family with the longest reign spanning over 1,700 years.

### *Neo-Assyrian Royal Court*

There were various groups of royal servants helping the king to administer his huge empire and maintain order when he was on a military campaign. The most important was the group of seven consisting of royal treasurer, palace herald, chief cupbearer, chief officer or eunuch, chief judge, grand vizier and commander in chief. These positions were far more important than their name might indicate and included more far reaching responsibilities and influence on the king. Some of these tasks might have been occupied by royal family members. Interesting is the employment of eunuchs. They were often some of the most highest ranking officials in the administration and army. They are reported to have been the most loyal to the ruler as they were recruited from lower social standing. A second group the magnates were mainly military leaders. The scholars were mostly advisors and specialists in their field such as scribes, medicine, astrology, religion, construction and art.

### *King Tiglath-Pileser III*

He came to power in 745 BC via a coup against

his ineffective father helped by governors of Assur and Kalah and ruled for 19 years. Interestingly he never mentioned his father in any of his texts. He was a powerful military leader and under his reign the empire reached its biggest expansion from Mediterranean to Persia and Gulf to Anatolia. He converted all independent vassal states into provinces. Plus, he transformed the army into a permanent professional entity with special forces and mercenaries. Previously the military system worked only with conscripts during summer months when farming activities were low. So, he used the conquered wealth for his army and for new provinces. His first military campaign was against Babylon. In the next he added two new provinces along the so-called Silk Road Bit Hamdan in the upper Diyala river area and Parsua east of Zagros mountains. Further campaigns included conquering Urartu and its capital Turushpa, defeating Hamath, Damascus and Hittite Unqi and integrated them as provinces. Defeated king Pekha in northern Palestine in a battle at Megiddo as well as king Mukin-zerri in Babylon and became first double king of Assyria and Babylon.

#### *Neo-Assyrian Conflict with Egypt*

At the time Egypt was fragmented into several small kingdoms in the Nile delta and in Upper Egypt the Nubians ruled. Several battles between Egypt and Assyria took place but there was no clear winner. In 671 BC Assyrian king Ashar-haddon invaded Egypt and captured Memphis the capital of pharaoh Taharka. After further fights with the Nubian army finally Assyria pushed the Nubians out of Egypt. Pharaoh Nekho and his son Psammetichus united Egypt again. Under Assyrian supremacy they started the Saite dynasty which ruled Egypt until the Persians conquered it.

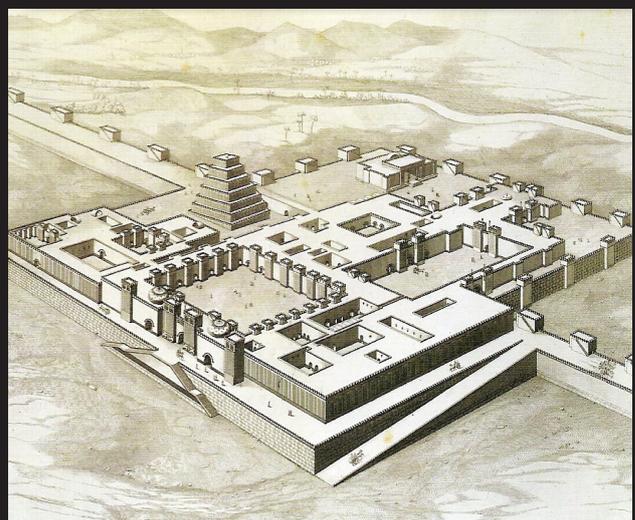
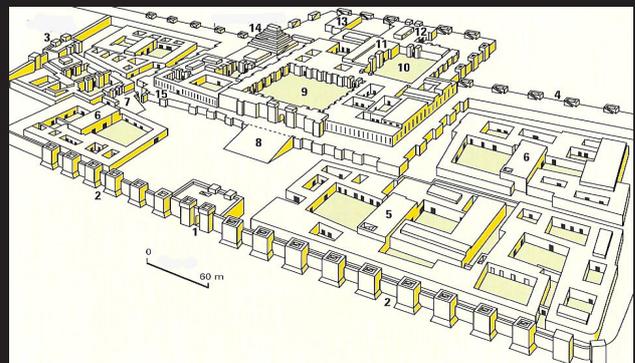
#### *Neo-Assyrian Script*

From about 700 BC onwards two scripts were used in Assyria, Aramaic letters and cuneiform pictograms. The annual king activities were now recorded in regular annals. These listed tribute states and the amounts of tributes paid. Like in Egypt relief scenes were carved on rocks at strategic points of the empire borders to mark Assyrian territory and demonstrate their power to possible invaders. Another important change took place with the change from clay platelets to

papyrus and parchment rolls for the use of smaller stamp seals and segment rings.

#### *Royal Annals*

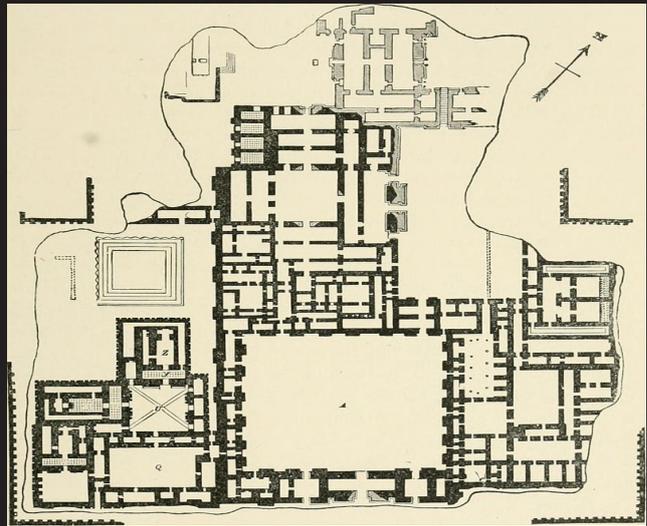
These texts were buried in foundations and walls of palaces and temples or engraved on the exterior walls of those buildings. Most palace stone relief slabs are engraved with cuneiform texts on the hidden back side. Both visible and hidden inscriptions were placed also on winged entrance guardian figures, door sockets and stone thresholds. The reason for reverse side hidden texts was to create a connection between king and buildings via his name engraved on both sides front and back. The second reason was a way of communication between the past, present and future kings so to speak cast in stone. Since Tiglath-Pileser octagonal biconic clay prisms or cylinders inscribed with minute cuneiform texts came into use. Also, shorter inscriptions on barrel shaped stone tablets or precious metal were now common. All these engraved artefacts were deposited in stone boxes and added as building block in the foundation layer of palace and temple buildings. Every time a place or temple was rebuilt the old boxes were opened and texts studied. Then new clay cylinders with new texts were added and together with old texts



deposited in the building foundations again. This tradition already started in Mesopotamia around 3000 BC. The Assyrian details and volume of inscriptions in this context are without parallel. Today they are a major source of information for archeologists and help to reconstruct Mesopotamian history. The texts often focus more on external foreign policy events, than on internal matters. But these texts have to be taken as biased as various kings tried to portray themselves as worthy representatives of gods on earth. It is also known that god Ashur demanded from kings to further their domain, which meant to extend their territory and gather more wealth. So, kings used to only describe their successes never failures. But from other sources we know they lost some battles. Annals also included trade agreements and peace negotiations.

### *Substantial Nineveh Library*

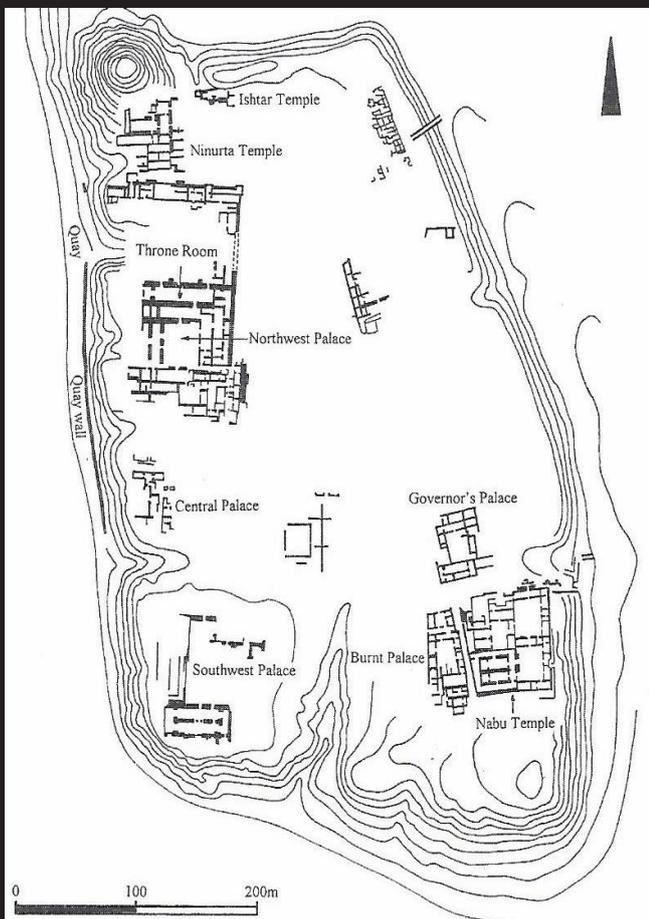
This famous library was created by Ashur-bani-pal III who was more a scholar than a military leader like all other Assyrian kings before him. He was trained in the following sophisticated scribes and priest skills. This included the full range of scribal learning, performing rituals of gods Ea and Asalluhi, interpreting anomalous births called *shumma izbu*, interpreting normal



phenomena called *shumma alu*, as well as the disciplines of exorcism, lamentation and chanting and he also had to be able to read Sumerian and Akkadian texts. Therefore, his aim was to establish an important library and add to normal administration texts all human knowledge. Military campaigns were used to gain ownership of foreign library contents and rare texts. He also dispatched special research parties across the Near and Middle East to find rare texts. The growing Nineveh library consisted of clay tablets, cylinders and other forms, wax covered writing boards, leather scrolls and papyri. 28,000 clay tablets were found here which were only a small percentage of the ancient library content. His scribes also created lexica with old Sumerian pictograms versus Assyrian cuneiform texts and dictionaries of all synonyms.

### *Assyrian Names & Meaning*

Assyrian names were special and represented whole sentences, blessings or prayers. For example, Adad-shezibanni meaning Oh Adad save me! Adad was the storm god. Or Nabura'im-ketti meaning Nabu loves the truth. Nabu was the god of scribes. But certain names were reserved for kings and invoked punishments if used by others. Therefore, kings changed their birth names to throne names like it was done in Egypt. Here are some further examples of royal names. Ashur-nirari meaning Ashur is my help a name used by 5 kings. Tiglath Pileser or Turkulti-apli-Esharra meant my thrust belongs to the son of the Esharra temple. This was an important shrine of god Ashur which was in the divine pantheon Ninurta's father. Or Tukulti-ninurta meaning my trust belongs to Ninurta the war god, son and heir of Ashur. Salmaneser or Salmanu-



ashared meaning Salmanu the god is the foremost. Sargon or Sharru-ken meant the king is true. And a last example, Sancherib or Sin-ahhe-eriba meaning Sin the moon god has replaced the brothers.

### *King Sargon II*

He was the son of Tiglath-Pileser III and brother of Salmanasser V. He came to power late at the age of 40 in 722 BC possibly as usurper after country wide rebellions in Syria, Hamath, Damascus and Arpad. He ruled only for 17 years because he died on the battle field at Tabal only one year after new capital Dur-Sharrukin was completed. Different to Kalah and Nineveh Dur-Sharrukin was a new city being erected within the very short time of 8 years from scratch. Crown prince Sancherib immediately played an important role after his death and as new king expanded the empire and changed the political map of the Levant area. His military campaigns included crushing revolts in Syria and destroying Hamath, attacking and conquering Carchemish where he looted 330 kg of gold and 63 tons silver plus copper, tin, iron and ivory. This rich booty changed the Assyrian economy from bronze coins to silver coins. In Musasir a small independent Urartu kingdom he looted one ton gold and

nine tons silver. Defeated Ashdod and created new province, conquered Neo-Hittite kingdom Gurgum, won Babylon back and moved to Babylon for four years.

### *Neo-Assyrian Palaces*

More than 12 palaces were built between 883 to 612 BC in Assur, Kalah, Dur-Sharrukin and Nineveh. As we can see from the layout, they were huge and richly decorated palaces with decorations similar to Egyptian relief scenes. One palace was built for Sargon II in Dur-Sharrukin measuring a mere 360,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Another for Ashur-nasir-pal in Kalah with decorations from the early phase of Neo-Assyrian sculptural tradition. A third palace was erected for Sancherib in Nineveh. Its doors were flanked by impressive winged bulls or lions called lamassu often decorated with bearded human heads weighing up to 40 tons. The walls were covered from floor to ceiling with grey Mosul marble plates covered with numerous relief scenes including military scenes as demonstration of Neo-Assyrian super power domination. Or they were decorated with mythical scenes, ornamental wall paintings, colored enamel tiles, wall carpets and huge textile weavings. And modeled bronze plates covered palace and temple doors. The military relief scenes were quite specific and included campaigns, attacks, besieging of cities, conquering, plundering, killing enemies and deportation of population and tribute deliveries. But the sacred tree motif can be seen for the first time and a variety of magical protective figures. The king is always shown as hero warrior, commander, hunter of wild animals, builder of temples, diplomat at banquets, worshipper in front of gods and at cult ceremonies.



### *Role of Royal Women*

During the reign of Neo-Assyrian king Asharhaddon the role of royal women changed. Now they had not only a ceremonial role but took over also important political decisions. These selected women included king mother Naqi'a, king's wife Esharra-hamat and eldest daughter Sherua-etirat. Royal women were financially independent and managed their own estates. This role was continued towards the end of the Assyrian empire under his son Ashur-bani-pal III. The royal seal symbol they used on documents was a scorpion. Most powerful was Shammuramat wife of Shamshi-Adad V. She participated even in military campaigns. Most interesting is that they had their own fully equipped military units which were not just an honorary guard.

### *Neo-Assyrian Sculpture*

Most sculptures were produced in stone. Some texts indicate that some sculptures were produced in bronze, copper and even gold. King depictions were also created as free standing stele and on cliff rock faces to mark empire borders, but also served to connect with gods and therefore were positioned at river sources, coasts and mountain tops. Relief scenes developed from stiff isolated figures to complex lively scenes with perspective reaching a high level mural art form and taking on a documentary role. These complex scenes included expansive battle field chaos, detailed besieged cities and transporting an abundance of looted goods. The scenes were well capturing proportion and sense of motion as well as naturalism. Some were depicting very realistically a lion hunt or riders in a forest and even swimmers crossing a river. At a later stage they were showing finer details of children fleeing at-



tacked cities, crabs in a river or horses in different typical behavior and body language. But the relief scenes often do not match with detailed cuneiform texts. For example, the Sancherib palace in Nineveh has an entire room showing the battle of Lachish, but important cuneiform text details about the battle are not shown in these relief scenes. The scenes also do not show the famous Jerusalem attack, which happened at the same time and is recorded in detail in these texts. The military war scenes of enemy punishment are brutal with impaling, flaying, burning, decapitation and public defilement of corpses, which were the common treatment for rebellious vassals at the time.

### *Nimrud Details*

Situated 30 km south of Mosul it reached an extension of 4 km<sup>2</sup>. It was first excavated 1845 and at various times thereafter. Many artefacts were unearthed and ended up in 80 museums worldwide. Unfortunately, the ISIS destroyed 90 % of the ruined site with bulldozers which can be well seen on the google earth pictures.

### *Surprising Nimrud Royal Tombs*

Archeologists seldom find royal tombs which have not been plundered before. Therefore, it was great luck when they discovered in the palace of King Ashur-nasir-pal in Nineveh three tombs of female royals in 1988 and 1989. They were undisturbed vaulted tombs with ante and main chambers. The terracotta sarcophagus with a female deceased fully covered with jewelry. The other tomb contained Jaba wife of King Tiglath-pileser III with even richer furnishings including 157 jewelry pieces, gold vessel, gold platelets on her dress, diadem on her head, various necklaces and bracelets, plus two pure gold anklets weighing 1 kg each. Later a second burial was placed in the same lime stone sarcophagus. This was 35 year old Banitu wife of Salmanasser V or Atalia wife of Sargon II. Some experts assume that Jaba and Banitu were same person married to two kings, because both names have the same meaning the beautiful and both were only identified by grave furnishings with different names and not by their bodies. The third tomb was that of Mullissu-mukannishat-ninua or palace lady a member of the harem under Ashur-nasir-pal II and Salmanasser III. At a

later stage three more bronze sarcophagi were deposited in this tomb with 23 kg of funeral furnishings of gold, silver and precious stones including an elaborate golden crown with vine leaves and grapes made of lapis lazuli, golden jug decorated with hunting and animal scenes, bracelets and various rings with semi precious stones.

### *Nineveh Details*

The first settlement on this site was established about 6000 BC and later used by the Hassuna, Halaf, Akkad, Ur III and Mitanni cultures. Around 2500 BC Nineveh was a very active trading town. By 700 BC it became the Assyrian capital with 120,000 inhabitants and was the largest Assyrian city. Today modern Mosul covers half of the old Nineveh city area. The main city goddess was Inanna called Ishtar in Assyrian and Babylonian language. King Sennacherib expanded the city and incorporated the town of Nurrugum. His palace was huge and 20 m high and had 80 rooms including royal parks with rare plants such as cotton. The rooms were decorated with 3,000 meters of detailed stone relief scenes including daily life and war depictions. Nineveh grew to an expansion of 8 km<sup>2</sup> protected by 12 km long city wall with a height of 10 m. The many towers were double as high. Its 15 fortified monumental double gates were flanked by the typical Assyrian winged bulls and were guarded by military. Huge irrigation systems supported all farming activities to feed the growing population. The city was supplied by water from mountain springs via 150 km of canals, aqueducts, underground canals, dams and ending up in numerous reservoirs.

### *King Ashur-bani-pal III*

He was the last important Assyrian king coming to power in 669 BC and ruled for 38



years. He continued the military campaigns and pushed Kushites out of Egypt and ruled in Egypt until 664 BC. Later he invaded and plundered Elam. But his brother Shamash-shumu-ukin king in Babylon was fighting for control of Assyria for four years. So, he killed him and burnt down Babylon. He installed a vassal king but it is not certain if he was acting as king of Babylon under a different name which was common practice at the time for double kingships. He never went to war like all other Assyrian kings because he was not a military leader. Nevertheless, he ordered various mass executions in military and administration ranks because of conspiracies against him. He was a well versed scholar and built up the largest library with all human knowledge available at the time.

#### *Capital Dur-Sharrukin*

Another Assyrian capital lies 15 km northeast of Mosul. It was erected by Sargon II and only used for a short period as capital because he died in battle. The city has a rectangular layout with an extension of 3 km<sup>2</sup>. The 6 km long city wall was fortified by 160 towers and had eight gates. At its base it measured 24 m and reached a height of 12 m. There were three temples for Nabu, Shamash and Sin plus three shrines for further gods. In addition, a ziqqurat, royal palace with hunting park and gardens with fruit trees and herbs were erected. These city descriptions give you an impression of the lavish royal life style and level of civilization.

#### *Picture Credits*

*We thank the various museums, institutions and photographers for making available some of their pictures and graphs.*

